THE PERSONAL TOUCH IN PAINTING

The Part It Has Played in the Growth of Mr. Childe Hassam

By Royal Cortissoz

Occasionally there appears in the salesroom a collection possessing so distinguished a character that one hates to see it broken up. Such a collection is that formed by Mr. Arthur F. Emmons, of Newport and this city, which is to be dispersed under the auspices of the American Art Association this winter. It is dedicated to but two painters, Monet and Renoir. W reproduce one of the pictures by th latter, his "Canotiers à Chaton," da ing from 1879. It is said to have bee so highly prized by the artist himself that it was only in recent years that he could be persuaded to sell it. Even a small reproduction throws some light on his affection for it. Obviously this is one of the finest things he ever painted. There are four other Lenoirs in the collection, early and late illustrations of his art. Mr. Emmons brought together no fewer than nineteen examples of Claude Monet, beginning with works of the early '70s and ending with four pieces from the Venice set of ten years ago. The Thames set is also represented and there is one of the lily pond pictures painted at the artist's Giverny home. Altogether this sale, which occurs in the ballroom of the Plaza next January, promises to prove the most remarkable affair of the kind since the Fuller and Sutton groups of Monets were sent to the hammer.

CANOTIERS A CHATON
(From the painting by Renoir in the Emmons collection.)

An Interesting Type of American Craftsmanship

The question as to what constitutes good American painting is peculiarly in the air this winter, thanks very largely to the proceedings of the new Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers. That body has made its exhibition a kind of challenge, inviting reflection as to the merits of this or that tendency in current art. An important contribution is made to the discussion by Mr. Childe Hassam. He is an impartial exhibitor if ever there was one. He shows at the Academy and with the new organization. His flag pictures are on view at the Parish House of the Church of the Ascension. And now he has opened at the Milch gallery an exhibition, retrospective in character, of paintings, water colors, pastels, etchings, lithographs and drawings. This last is a rather courageous affirmation. Mr. Hassam held much the same sort of show at the Montross gallery only four years ago. A lesser painter, in the same circumstances, might be in danger of wearing out his welcome, and, to tell the truth, not even Mr. Hassam is quite secure in thus asserting himself. If he makes plain his strength he also makes plain his weakness. But he has strength enough to justify, on the whole, the frequency of his public appearances, and this latest demonstration is, as we have hinted, especially apposite. It illuminates a little that question of "good American painting."

As Mr. John C. Van Dyke has pointed out, in the book traversed in this place last Sunday, a lot of good American painting has been, in a sense, good French painting. Its best qualities have been rooted in French technique. Mr. Hassam is pat with a picture to confirm this hypothesis. His "Autumn," a full-length portrait of a shabby old harpist shambling across a tall canvas, wos shown in the Salon of 1888. It is unmistakably a Salon picture. It could have been painted only in France, under the influence of French ideas. Like so many Salon pictures, it wears a rather faded air. One feels that it served its purpose long ago. Long ago Mr. Hassam traveled to a much higher plane. Yet it makes its mild appeal in genuine fashion and the point is significant. The indurated Salonnier is known by the barefaced nature of his tricks. He wants to "make a hole in the wall," to attract attention, and to this end he is capable of almost any sensationalism. One thing that saves the "Autumn" is its sincerity. It is painted not to make a hole in the wall, but because the artist was interested in his technique for its own sake. The force of this truth becomes the more apparent as the observer goes through the show with a certain care for its chronology. He sees then how Mr. Hassam grows in his art, paints better and better, always spurred on by his love for his medium. Little by little there develops from this ardor something which transcends the French character of his work. There develops the personal touch, the individual qualities of color, texture, brushwork, which give the artist his rank. You see at this point also why it is that Mr. Hassam finds it perfectly convenient to exhibit with both the new society and the Academy. He has nothing to do with the tendencies, such as they are, in either camp. He lives in his own ivory tower.

His associates in the recent "secession" might remark that that is precisely what they are trying to do. Perhaps, but there is a difference, and it is in this difference that we find the explanation of Mr. Hassam's success as an artist. His craftsmanship is more sensitive than theirs; he has a more exacting taste. He has founded his ivory tower not on any recondite ideas. He has no interest in subject as subject. There is only a trace of sentiment, and that a slight one, in this entire exhibition, the picture of the girl at the piano, "The Maréchal Niel Rose." But all through his paintings there is disclosed the best foundation of all—a feeling for beauty. There are times when decorative beauty attracts him. Witness the background in "The West Indian Girl," the web of form and color based on fruits and leafage. But as a rule the beauty for which he searches is in no wise confined within the borders of a pattern. It is, instead, the beauty of nature pure and simple, an affair of light and color, of some casual moment of sensuous charm. Superficially considered, Mr. Hassam seems a versatile type. He uses all the mediums. He paints the figure and he paints landscape. Still life interests him. He has wandered far and wide, here and in Europe, in pursuit of his themes, and wherever he goes he interprets what he sees with marked sympathy and understanding. Nothing could be more intensely "local" than his delightful pastel, "The Graveyard at Lexington, Mass.," unless it be the tiny sketch of an English seawall, the "Broadstairs." There is versatility, we suppose, in all this. Yet there is one thing which he does better than anything else.

This is the kind of picture that is represented by "The Laurel in the Ledges, Appledore," or by "The Sea Gull." Such works as these inspire the surmise that if Mr. Hassam had devoted himself altogether to landscape he might have made himself one of the greatest pillars of our school. He has the salient merit of our school, which is to exploit the informal episode in nature rather than to work out the academically balanced composition. His open air subjects are never forced—they happen. He has a wonderful gift for the definition of ground forms, for the free but exact delineation of rocky shores, for the painting of green things, and the clear, cool illumination of skies. The sylvan sweetness of the "October Woods" is beyond praise. He has dealt over and over again with the motive of this composition and in those versions of it which have set nude figures against a screen of trees he has sometimes deviated into a somewhat specious effect. But the "October Woods" doesn't harbor a single meretricious stroke. Here his wonted sincerity again wins the day.

The Personal Touch Versus Academic Discipline

So long as Mr. Hassam paints landscape he is on safe ground. The charm of his pictures may vary, but fundamentally they maintain their vital, interesting quality. With the figure he takes his chances, sometimes hits the mark, but as often stumbles into dullness. The nude, brought well into the foreground, almost invariably baffles him. The gleaming bodies now and then enlivening his outdoor scenes are painted on a small scale, they are no more than piquant accents on the main theme, and they fit pleasantly into the picture. Isolated and studied at full length, they are sadly disappointing. Take the "Spring Garland" of 1909, or the "Youth" of 1914. They are pretty bits, but that is all. They disclose no distinction of line, no skill in modeling. Curiously, they do not even reflect the gusto which is ordinarily inseparable from Mr. Hassam's work. They seem to have been painted doggedly, by main strength, and at the same time, if we may risk the seeming contradiction in terms, feebly. What has become of that personal touch on which we are inclined to lay so much stress? The answer brings us back to our original problem. The personal touch, precious as it is, potential as it is, will not always tell the whole story. There are phases of art in which it is helpless without academic discipline. The ivory tower is a blissful habitation but there is nothing talismanic about it. To dwell therein is not necessarily to be dowered with all of an artist's resources.

It is possible to say of an enormous amount of the work done by this exceptionally prolific artist that it is "painted," meaning that it is packed with sound, authoritative technique. It is rarely possible to say of one of his nudes that it is "drawn," meaning that the draftsmanship in it is thoroughgoing and distinguished. He has better luck with the draped figure. The piano picture already cited offers a case in point. The "West Indian Girl" offers another. Whenever he has the color in stuffs, in flowers and other accessories to deal with he paints with a surer brush; and if he can bring plenty of sunny air into his scheme the prospects for a good picture are even more favorable. But the figure subjects here are not, in general, the canvases on which it is most agreeable to linger. They have their attractive points. On the other hand, they are no more indicative of Mr. Hassam's strength than they are of his weakness. His weakness, concisely expressed, would appear to reside in his attempting to carry the effectiveness of the personal touch too far, in assuming that it will endow almost any production with artistic vitality. It is at first blush inspiriting to observe a talent as versatile as his, to watch its operations in so many fields, but it is disconcerting to find that while some of the etchings, for example, are charming, others are empty, and that the lithographs and water colors are in the same uncertain case.

Is not this suggestive of the very perils which lurk in that personal quality on which we have paused with so much appreciation? It is indispensable in art. Lacking it, the artist might as well put up the shutters. It has worked and still works something like miracles for Mr. Hassam. It has placed him in the front rank of American painters. Because he has it, his work remains an admirable example of "good American painting." And yet we never see a collection of his pictures, rich, as this one is, in sensations for which we are grateful, without wishing that divers other virtues had been added unto him. Think of what his nudes would be like if they were put together with more constructive power! Think of what his art would be with finer elements of inventive design, with a deeper imaginative glow, with a wider scope as to ideas! But to think these thoughts is possibly to go a little nearer than we ought to go to the unlawful process of asking Mr. Hassam to be somebody else. Let us rejoice, instead, that his ardor for beauty, for light and color, and for the sheer poy of painting takes him as far as it does. It takes him a long way.

Exhibition of Persian Art at Bush Terminal

Among many attractive articles in the exhibition of Persian art opening tomorrow at the Bushi Terminal Building are the following: Tapestry, representing every specimen which was made from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. One item is considered a wonderful piece, as it depicts the idea of art from different centuries. This is the only complete collection which was found in ancient Persia.

A beautiful specimen shawl covered with fine embroidery of palm leaf and floral design, in which the center represents the tree of life, on which are posed two doves, made in the late eighteenth century, is considered one of the finest specimens of its kind.

A seventeenth century large woven shawl. This is the only shawl seen done in the late seventeenth century in flower design. This shawl was the property of the Fath Ali Shah in Persia, who was a contemporary of Napoleon the First.

Square wood block print, made during the eighteenth century, covered with floral designs and considered one of the finest specimens of its kind.

Wood block print, representing prayer design. The center is covered with beautiful floral design and rose bush, each side representing a cypress surrounded with floral design.

A Royal Kurdistan, made in the city of Senna forty years ago by special order of Prince Farman Farma for presentation to the late Shah Nassered Din of Persia, the design being a combination of floral Persian and Mongolian geometric.

"Seat of Honor" rug made in Senna, capital of Kurdistan, has a field occupied by stately so-called "palm leaves," inclosing the tree of life.

A very large Isfahan-meshed rug illustrates an early design.

A collection of pieces of pottery dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, excavated from the ruins of palaces buried in the ancient city of Rhages, the site of which is within a few miles from the city of Teheran, the present capital of Persia. These pieces are remarkable in workmanship, in the richness of the glaze, in the symbolic motif represented in each, and in the fact that they consist of the original pieces which have fortunately been discovered and put together, that is, there are no missing pieces in these to have been replaced by modern repairing. The iridescent pieces mostly belong to the Sultanabad ruins and the iridescence is caused by the oxidation brought about by contact with the ground. Those designed in gold are usually palace pieces, while those in rich blue have been dedicated to religious purposes.

Plaque, made of composition metal and said by some to commemorate the Fall of Babylon under Cyrus. This is an exact miniature of the bas-relief at Parsargadae near Perseopolis.

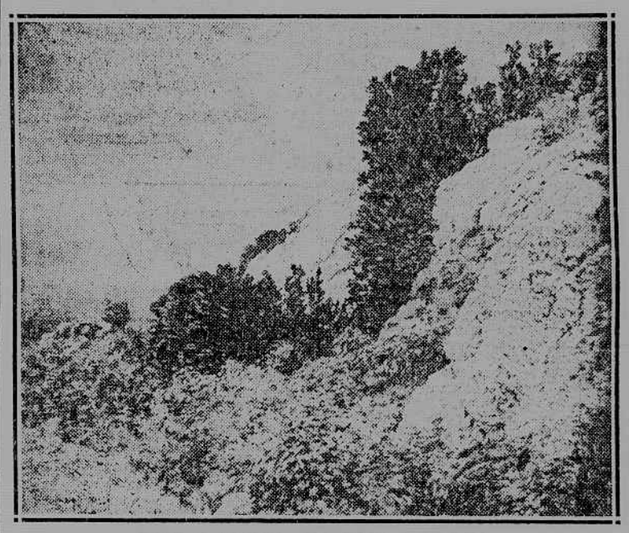
Furniture, which displays rare skill, comprises two chests, a table, chairs and several boxes, in a very hard wood, inlaid with ivory, ebony and gold, made during the last three hundred years, and intended for receptions to diplomats.

Scroll manuscript, of the Koran (Mahometan Bible), which when folded is about three inches in dimensions. It was owned by Fath Ali Shah, a contemporary of Napoleon. It is written with a reed pen in the smallest script possible. The main verses of the Koran are placed in larger script across the pages. The writings and the floral design are of such exquisite form that critics have pronounced this manuscript the finest and most valuable specimen of Persian calligraphy extant.

Complete manuscript of Shahnameh, of Firdousi (tenth century), written in Nastaliq style in about the year 829 A. H. (505 years ago). The work contains twenty-one miniature water color paintings descriptive of the text. The miniature represents some of the best features of that artistic design and coloring which later laid the foundation of the art of the Behzad school. The cover is in old gold, burnt in a field of parchment, covered with Arabesque design. This is the famous Bey Songhori manuscript. For, as the preface, which gives the date, states, this was copied by order of Shah Bey Songhori Khan from the most authentic manuscript then extant.

Brass, copper and steel works, dating back from thirteenth to eighteenth century. The collection consists of several jars beautifully engraved and enameled, a set of finger bowls, which are called "Afetbeh" legan, consisting of four pieces engraved with the finest floral design and rose bush, which are also plated with gold.

Fine examples of armor and metal work, including battle axes and maces that were not intended for actual fighting but were carried by heralds. A gun is also part of the collection, being one of the earliest ever made in Persia.



THE LAUREL IN THE LEDGES
(From the painting by Childe Hassam at the Milch Gallery.)

Calendar of Exhibitions

Academy Art Shop, 153 West Fifty-seventh Street—Kasimir etchings and Karasz batiks.

Ainslee Galleries, 615 Fifth Avenue—Permanent exhibition of paintings by George Inness.

Anderson Galleries, Park Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street—Emmons collection of paintings.

Ackermann Galleries, 10 East Forty-sixth Street—Old English sporting prints and color drawings of American aeroplanes in France.

Babcock Galleries—Fifth annual exhibition by the Eclectics.

Bush Terminal Sales Building, 130 West Forty-second Street—Exhibition of Persian art.

Calo Galleries, 107 West Forty-sixth Street—Foreign and American paintings.

Church of the Ascension Parish House, 12 West Eleventh Street—Street scenes by Childe Hassam and relics from the churches of Verdun.

Daniel Galleries, 2 West Forty-seventh Street—Paintings by Man Ray.

Dudensing Galleries, 45 West Forty-fourth Street—Paintings by Inness, Wyant, Blakelock and others.

Duveen Galleries—Old Chinese porcelains.

Ferargil Galleries, 607 Fifth Avenue—Paintings by Emil Carlsen and Edward Willis Redfield.

Gimpel and Wildenstein, 647 Fifth Avenue—First annual exhibition of the American Painters, Gravers and Sculptors.

Hahlo Galleries, 569 Fifth Avenue—Lithographs by Whistler.

Knoedler Galleries—Water colors and pastels.

Keppel Galleries—Etchings by Zorn.

Lantern Galleries—Paintings by contemporary artists.

Macbeth Galleries—Paintings by American artists.

Madison Galleries, 106 West Fifty-seventh Street—American paintings.

Milch Galleries, 108 West Fifty-seventh Street—Pictures by Childe Hassam.

New Galleries, 17 East Fifty-fourth Street—Mrs. St. John Alexander's collection of antique rugs and tapestries.

Powell Galleries—Street scenes by Caroline Van H. Bean.

Ralston Galleries—Landscapes by Frank De Haven.

Schultheis Galleries, 425 Fifth Avenue—Paintings by Charles Hetherington.

Touchstone Galleries, 11 West Forty-seventh Street—Oil paintings by Julie Stohr.

Weyle Galleries—Lithographs by Odilon Redon.

Zayas Galleries, 549 Fifth Avenue—Paintings by Degas, Manet, Renoir, Courbet, Cézanne and Matisse.

Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

The painters calling themselves "The Eclectics" have just opened an exhibition at the Babcock gallery. This is their fifth annual appearance. The show lasts until December 6.

A collection of water colors and pastels assembled by Mrs. Albert Sterner may be seen at the Knoedler gallery. It contains a few foreign pieces, sketches by Pisarro and Renoir, and a particularly spirited "Bull Fight" by Roberto Domingo; but the bulk of the work is American, ranging from Maine coast studies by Winslow Homer to woodland pastels by Robert Henri and examples of George Bellows, Albert Sterner, Childe Hassam and W. Glackens. The Southern scenes by George Hart are especially to be noted. Downstairs at this gallery there is a room handsomely filled with eighteenth century portraits. Accompanying them are some busts by the British sculptor, Lynn Jenkins.

The Keppel gallery brings forward a collection of threescore of Zorn's etchings, many of them in fine impressions. A few new plates are included, further illustrations of this artist's skill in depicting the nude out of doors. They denote no progress. On the contrary, Zorn's earlier etchings remain his best works with the needle. He has never done anything to beat, for example, the magnificent "Ernest Renan" with which he long ago won fame. Zorn is an odd type. He draws swiftly and with amazing accuracy. His portraits are among the most vitalized prints in modern art. The nudes are all clever performances and some of them have undeniable charm. But in style he belongs amongthe virtuosi of pen draftsmanship rather than amongst the masters of etching. An exhibition like this always gives pleasure and always leaves the connoisseur of pure etching a little dissatisfied.

The Powell Gallery announces an exhibition of portrait drawings and New York street scenes by Caroline Van H. Bean. It lasts until the end of the month.

The fourth annual exhibition of the Brooklyn Society of Etchers will be opened in the print galleries of the Brooklyn Museum on Wednesday, December 3, to last until December 31. There will be fifty-two contributors, who will send original works in etching, dry point, aquatint and mezzotint. Four prizes will be awarded.

Mr. Man Ray presents at the Daniel gallery a group of drawings and paint-

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